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Edwin R. Seligman



To the Right Honourable the Parliament
of *England* Assembled at *Westminster*.

^{19.} ^{19.} ^{19.}
An Answer of the Worsted Weavers of the City of
Norwich, and the County of *Norfolke*, to the Re-
plies of the *Wooll-Combers*.



Notwithstanding the unjust and false Informations
of the *Wooll-Combers*, whereby they labour
to cast a Mist before the eyes of this Honorable
Parliament, by misrepresenting our case, that
so they may bee left at liberty to deceive the
Common-wealth, and wholly overthrow trade;
and not betyed by any Rule, but walke accor-
ding to their owne Wills: Therefore they
take the boldnesse to anticipate the Parliament
by condemning those just desires which wee the Worsted Wavers of
Norwich and *Norfolke*, have offered for the Regulation of a Trade of
such great Importanceto this Common-wealth; they laying to our
charge, [*That it is a Monopoly; Oppressive to thousands of people, destru-
ctive to Trade, illegal, and aiming at an arbitrary power to our selves
over the Wooll-Comber, and not for the publick good;*] A heavy
charge could it bee proved: but if wee can quit our selves before
your Honours of this unjust charge, and make it appear that the Wool-
Comber in his constant practice is the most dishonest, unconscionable,
deceitfull, and the greatest oppressor of the poore (that we know of)
that useth any Trade in this Common-wealth; and that their false and
deceitfull dealing in making, and selling yarne defective, hath beene the
undoing of very many of the trade of Worsted Weavers; then wee
hope this Parliament will by a Law confirme to us those good and anci-
ent customes which we have always had and practised, without which

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the whole Trade of Worsted Weavers must bee wholly ruined and overthrowne, and thereby the poore of these Counties left without employment ; as we shall sufficiently make it appeare ; and wee can but wonder, that the Wooll-Combers dare take such a latitude of Printing and Publishing such manifest untruths to the view of the world as they doe ; but that we know that they who make no conscience of deceit in their practise, will make but little scruple in defending it by words.

I. Their first Reason is, [*The poore Spinster must spinne f. ur skore thousand threds for but six shillings.*] We answer, that if six shillings be not enough for so much worke, why doe they not give them more? They further say, [*If the Spinster mistake but in one thread in so many the whole is brought under a penalty.*] Wee Answer, this is wholly false ; for the grosse of yarne is distinguished into Reeel-staves and Leas ; every Reeel-staffe containing fourteen Leas ; and wee discover the defect by telling the threads in a Lea which is forty, (if it bee true reeled :) But their constant practice is to sell us yarne for true, which wanteth ordinarily 8, 10, and sometimes 20 threads in 40 ; and yet this is not all we suffer by them, but in the length of the Reeel also, wanting generally three, four, or five Inches, which is the ninth or tenth part more : and when wee discover this great deceit, we do not (as they falsely charge us) seize the whole grosse, but the Reeel-staves so found defective, either in length or tale ; and therefore they have no cause to charge us with the seizing of a whole grosse for one thread, but are confident we never yet seized a grosse of yarne for wanting but 500 threads ; and yet the common Instrument on which the yarne is Reeled, is made so at first as they are a full yard about, and runne so certaine, as that a childe of eight yeares old may reele it right without telling the threads, and cannot doe otherwise but on set purpose to deceive : so that what they call a mistake, is indeed and in truth a manifest deceit ; and this deceit is not onely the fault of the Spinster, but of the Comber ; and thus it doth appeare : When the Comber puts out his pound of wooll to the Spinster, he tells her shee must make so many Reeel staves of it ; when as the wooll is so course as shee cannot draw it to such a number, yet to please the Comber shee is constrained to reele it false both in length and tale to make up the number of Reeel-staves, for there lyes his profit in the number of Reel-staves, whether he selleth it by the grosse, or by the pound ; and herein is the VVeavers great losse, when there is not the full length and tale of threads ; for according to the number of Reeel-staves in a pound, so is the price more or lesse : Now, the Comber doth sell us according to this Rule a grosse of yarne, when indeed it wanteth a fourth part, and sometimes more, and this necessitates the VVeaver to make his Stuffs

deceitfully. We say, to have our Yarn Reeled and sold by length and tale, is according to the constant practise of all ages; [*This they say is untrue*] and then they flye to other parts of the Common-wealth. We Answer, Why doe they not go to those places to sell their yarn? But we offer it to all the world, whether it was ever knowne or practised in *Norwich* and *Norfolk* to buy and sell Yarne that is greasie, in any other way than by length and tale, as is now desired, or else why did the Suffolk Combers conforme to the same Rule when they came to seek a trade amongst us, which is not much above forty years since.

II. To the second Reason, which is, [*That we may falsifie their yarne after seizure.*] We again challenge them to prove that ever it was done; and we hope our sworne men are more honest and just; and truely wee heartily wish the Combers would have beene so honest (as they ought) that wee might not have had such just cause of complaint against them as now we have. [*They say we may pull out a thread,*] but cannot say that ever it was done: but we say and will make it good, that they doe frequently deceive us; and when wee doe discover it, they refuse to make us satisfaction, and this their false dealing is the cause of all this trouble.

III. To their third Reason, where they say, [*Wee would make our selves Jurates and Judges, and take the Fine to our selves.*] Wee Answer: We wonder they dare charge us with this, when as they know before our Honourable Committee, and at severall other times wee have offered them that halfe the Jury should be Combers: and this they say, [*is but a trap to delude them, and make them their owne executioners and betrayers, and therefore much worse; it being a Maxime, No man is bound to betray himselfe.*] By which it is cleare, they have of late had so large a profit by their false dealing, as that now they oppose any law to punish it either by themselves or others; and for the Fines let them be disposed as the Parliament please, although it be no more than we have formerly had, and the Law allowes in other cases, as between the Tanners and the Cordwainers. And whereas they say, [*It is as fit the Parliament should make the buyers of stufte Jurates.*] We answer, that when they doe finde that wee deceive the buyer a fourth part of his measure (as they frequently deale with us) and that our Wardens shall seale twenty yards of stufte for a piece, which should be 27. to which they are sworne, we being thereunto impowred by the Statute of *Edw. 4. c. 7.* and never was neglected till the Combers ranne into such extravagant courses of false Reeling their yarn for these seven yeares last past, and till wee be inabled with power as formerly to remedy this so great an evill, it is impossible wee should make our Stuffs to their former goodnesse, so as they may bear

the seale, and be good for the Common-wealth.

In their fourth Reason they say, [*That as the Wooll-grower is not punished for the Wooll-winders fault, so should not the Comber for the Spinsters fault.*] We Answer, that if the Wooll-grower and the Wooll-winder do compact and agree together that the fleeces of Wooll be wound up so deceitfully as that a great part thereof bee stones and dirt, and the Wooll-grower sell this for good and true wound Wool, and the Comber discover this deceit, wee beleieve hee will looke for a recompence from the wooll-grower (as well he may) and this is the true state of the case between them and us; for the Comber and the Spinster do many times compact and agree together in making up their yarn short and false, to deceive the weaver; and therefore as the Law does provide a knowne wooll-winder that so the Comber bee not deceived in his wooll; so we desire a Law as formerly wee have had to prevent the deceit of the Comber.

V. In their fift Reason they say, [*We may make yarne our selves as they doe, if wee thinke good, and may buy of them what we please, and leave the rest to be sold to the Hosiers.*] VVe Answer, we know wee may, and some of us doe; but this wee can affirme, that the Combers will (when trading goeth quick) for their owne private gaine, entise away our Spinsters, not by giving them more for their work, but by allowing, counselling, and encouraging them to reele shorter and falsier than it should be, and they will take it off their hands, and this many of the honestest Combers have oftentimes in our hearing complained of, and wished there might bee a power granted to remedy this great mischief; and some of them do say, that in about 30 years trading with us, they were never damnified by the seizure of their yarne to the value of forty shillings; and we heartily wish all the rest were like them: And this we can affirm also, that some one of them have said they lost twenty pound in one yeare when trading was good, by having his Spinsters entised from him by some of their own Trade, who would take any length and tale of the Spinster, when the other would have his yarne made to a certaine goodnesse and truth: by all which it appeareth, the want of a due regulation for all men to walke by, is hurtfull to all, and good for none. [*They say, to tell the number of Leas and Thread is a worke of great difficulty.*] Answ. And therefore shall there be no Law, no Rule, nor power to finde out such defects? but their deceit and fallhood is so great, and their unjust gaine so much, that rather than they will lose that, (by being rectified) they had rather we and all the Common-wealth should be ruined.

They further charge us [*That wee seeke to get an arbitrary power over their goods, and would monopolize them wholly into our hands.*]

Answ.

Ans. That that power cannot be arbitrary when it sets out a standing rule (and that by a law) for all men to walke by, and this no new rule but what hath bin practised time out of minde amongst us, and is so necessary for the well-being of our trade, that to alter it were to overthrow that whole manufacture. And a Monopoly it cannot be, because they have their liberty whether they will bring any yarne to us or not; if they doe, we expect it should be made according to a knowne rule. [*They plead a liberty of making false yarne to sell to the Hosiers.*] Wee answer, by this they would perswade the Parliament that the Hosier is content that they should make their yarne false; when the truth is the Hosier doth complaine of it as well as the Weaver, and have also bin by them deceived to a great value, even in that yarne which is made white and sold by the pound, and doe cry to the Parliament for a reformation of that abuse: as may appeare by their severall petitions from *Norwich* and *Yarmouth*, presented to our honourable Committee of Parliament, and are in the hand of Mr *Garland* Chaireman to that Committee.

VI. In their sixth reason, they say [*That others no way interressed in the businesse are more competent Judges than wee, meaning the Say and Bay weavers.*] *Ans.* Herein they declare a meere falsehood, for many of those that bring us this false yarne are Say and Bay makers, and doe make use of the same yarne that wee doe; and when their Says and Bayes will not sell, then they bring their yarne to us, and this is the yarne we are most abused in: and besides, those men who imploy themselves wholly in making Saies and Baies, doe say that the Combers who trade to *Norwich*, are the onely cause of the false making of yarn; for when there is a quicke trade at *Norwich*, and Sayes and Bayes goeth well also, the great strife between them is, who shall get most spinning, and thereby the Comber makes his advantage by taking in his yarne false, and so get away the others spinners, and thereby deceive the Weaver also: And when we finde fault with the Combers for bringing their yarne so false to us, they say if they will not take such, they must lose all their spinners; for the Say and Bay makers will give the spinners worke and take any length and tale of them: by which all men may plainly see, for want of a standing rule to walke by, all will run into a confusion.

VII. In the seventh reason they say [*That by law the Master is not punishable for the workemans fault*] Wee answer, that because they would be thought to know the law, therefore we demand of them what law is against it; wee are sure the same practice is in our trade (and ever was) as also in *Colchester*, and in all other parts of the Nation where the trade is under any government; the Master carrieth his

ware to be searched and sealed, and if it be found defective it is seized, and fined by a Jury of sworne men, who doe set a fine upon it answerable to the defect, and he cannot have his ware unlesse he payeth the fine, although the fault was made by the workeman, and this wee never accounted to be against the law. By all which it appeares, we desire no more power to regulate them, than wee doe against our selves, and yet they clamour against us; but this the Comber cries out against, because the greatest part of his profit lyeth in this deceit: and thus it will appear if the Spinster make but six Reel-staffes of a pound by her false reeling, more then indeed it is (were it truly reeled,) and for this six Reel-staffes the Comber alloweth her three pence, and selleth it to the weaver for nine pence: And besides the Comber many times when he findeth that the Spinster hath reeled up her yarne false, he maketh her abate foure pence in twelve pence of her wages, and then putteth it among the rest and selleth altogether for true to the Weaver, and so maketh advantage both of the poore Spinster and Weaver also; too great a gaine to be so ill got, and no mervaile he is so loath to have a regulation, but like *Demetrius* cries up this their great *Diana*.

VIII. In their eighth reason they say [*That when the defect be discovered the seller abates of his price, and here they say our mouths are stopt, and wee answer not a word.*] *Ans.* If we formerly have said nothing to this, wee have done them the more favour, and our selves the more wrong, but this is as false as all the rest; and therefore we say, that when we come to buy their yarn of them, & discover the defects thereof, and convince them that it wanteth a fift or fourth part of what it should be; yet they will not allow for what is wanting, but will say there it is, if you like it not leave it with us; and when he is gone, stil they waite for a man of lesse judgement, or one that is not so carefull to look to what he buyeth: and although it was discovered by the other to be false, yet he selleth it to him for good, and so maketh a prey of him: and by this meanes they have undone many young trades-men, and wronged and deceived others to a great value: and this is a true answer to it.

IX. Their ninth reason is, [*That the selling yarne by length and tale doth occasion it to be drawne to a small thread and beyond the staple, and so made infirme, and by that meanes the stufes are discredited in forreigne parts; and to prevent this they would sell yarne by the pound.*] *Ans.* They have herein as in all the rest mistated the case, and so have abused your Honours. 1. We demand of them who it is that casteth the wooll courser than it should be, but the Comber. 2. Who it is that causeth the yarne to be drawne too small but the Comber, when he hireth the Spinster to make as many Reel-staffes of her pound of wooll as possibly she can;

can; for according to the number of the Reel-staffes in a pound, so is his price more or lesse, not caring how false it be, so it may bring him in gain: now the courser the wooll is, the worse it is for the Spinster, and the more infirme it is, which makes it the worse for the weaver, and makes his stufes to be discredited both at home and in forraigne parts; and who hath the present good of all this but the Comber? So by their own confessing, they are the cause of the discredit of the stufes, which will tend to the overthrow of the trade, and in the end will ruine the poore for want of imployment, and the remedy which they prescribe is worse than the mischief, namely selling yarne by the pound; for then wee must lay aside all our richest and best stufes which are made of the finest yarne that can be spunne, if the wool be answerable in finenesse: which stufes for variety of sorts and goodnesse of making, all the Nation have not the like. Againe if we buy yarne by the pound, we are at no certainty how to make our stufes either in length bredth or goodnesse of making, nor how much to buy, and put out to the dying to make a peece of stuf on; which will inevitably undoe us.

X. Their tenth reason is, [*That the Weavers who buy their yarne by the pound, make the best and most durable stufes.*] *Answer.* There is not one word or syllable of truth in their reason, or in their reply, if it be rightly understood; for in all other places where there is stufes made, either they make them all white, (and so there is not such difficulty in making them) or else they are helped by scowring or thickning after they be wrought; but for the *Norwich* stufes the greatest part of them are made in colours and dyed in the yarn, and we bound by the orders of our trade to make them of full length, bredth, and to such a number of threads in the bredth, or else wee cannot have them sealed, and so passe for currant made stufes where ever they be vended; the truth is, in *Norwich* and *Norfolke*, we have not lesse then fifty or sixty severall sorts of stufes, all which are very usefull and beneficiall to the Commonwealth, the greatest part of which would be wholly overthrowne and lost to this Nation, if these Combers should have their unjust desires; for if the Weavers trade be lost the poore must soone be ruined for want of imployment; and as it is destructive to our trade, so it is more deceitfull to the Commonwealth; and thus it doth appeare.

1. In the sayming of the wooll, the best sayme for lightnesse in weight, and for cleaneesse in scouring is Sivill oyle, and that we desire all our yarne should be saymed with; but this being dearer to the Comber, therefore for their owne advantage they will sayme with Rape oyle, Whey butter, Goose-grease, and Kitching-stuffe, and such like filthy stuffe; and a pound of Sivill oyle will sayme as much wooll as two pound of the other, so that the worse the sayme be, the more it will weigh, and who will use the best if they sell by weight, for the worst is most for the Combers profit, and for every shilling the Comber saves by this, the Commonwealth may lose twenty shillings, for the filthy sayme will never be cleane scoured out, wee scouring all our yarne before we worke it into stufes, (and not worke in the grease as the Clothiers, Bay and Say Weavers doe) and when these yarnes cannot be cleane scoured, they cannot take good colours; and when they are close packed up and sent beyond the sea, they will get a heate, and mould, stink and rot, and all this for the benefit of the Comber onely.

2. The Combers bring their yarne some twenty, thirty, or forty miles upon

horse-backe in a pack-cloth, through wet and dirt; they come into *Norwich* over night, and make their market the same night, or the next day at furthest, and we know nothing will sucke up water like wool or yarne; and how fit this yarn will be to sel by the pound, we leave to your Honours, and all men to judge.

3. If they should sell yarne by the pound, the greatest part of our yarne would be spoiled by making it uneven, great and gouty, and so spoile the wooll, and therby we should be necessitated to make our stuffs worse for the Commonwealth than ever.

4. Many times their Spinsters either lose or steale part of their wool, and to make it good to the Comber, do wet, strew sand, salt, and dirty it what they can to make up their weight; and is this fit to be sold by the pound as they would have it? And likewise the Combers do use deceit by laying their yarne in sellers and moist places, and otherwaies abuse it; but this may be sufficient to informe your Honours what just cause wee have to complaine, and what need there is of a just and due regulation, that so we may honour God by doing the work of righteousness in our callings, which will be the honour of our nation.

XI. Their eleventh reason is, [*That as before they charge us with an indeavour to monopolize*] *Ans.* And this is even as true as all the rest, and herein we thinke that the Combers know not what a monopoly is, and therefore know not what they say: wee have alwaies extremely hated monopolizing, and when they can make it appeare that there is any colour of monopoly in it, we shall lay it downe for ever.

The case is truly thus; the Combers make yarne for the use of the *Norwich* and *Norfolk* Weavers, the which they bring to *Norwich* to sell, and there they may stay as long as they please, and have liberty to sell to what Weaver or Hosier they please, and may sell their yarne for what price they can get, and either by weight or tale, if any will buy it so of them: And we desire no law to hinder them or take away their liberty in any of these things; but that which we desire, is that all yarns may be reeled to a certain length & tale, which makes it more fit for any use than otherwise, and is indeed the onely way to prevent deceit; and because they may not be left at liberty to deceive the buyer of a fourth or third part, sometimes more, of what he buyeth and payeth for; and because we seeke a power to punish such deceit, therefore they cry out a Monopoly. [*They further say that in case they lay downe their trade (as they call it) that we cannot set the poore on worke.*] By which (implicitey) they seeme to threaten the Parliament, that if they may not have liberty to use (without controule) that deceit which they have now practised for these seven yeares, they will lay downe their trade. We shortly answer, that if they be suffered by this practice to overthrow the Weavers trade, and so undoe us, both they and we must lay downe all trading, and the poore be wholly undone for want of imployment: for the Combers have not lesse of the Weavers of *Norwich* and *Norfolke* weekly than 1500 or 2000 l. for yarnes bought of them. [*And whereas they seeme to boast of their great estates*] Truly we thinke they have cause to be thankfull to us, for surely they have got them by us; we wish we could not say they had got them from us, and that by deceit too, the Weavers being deceived by them to the value of 200 l. and upwards every weeke of our trading with them, in the shortnesse and falsenesse of our yarnes.

Now seeing as we have truly made it appeare, this practice of the Comber hath been very oppressive to the poore, deceitfull to the Weaver, and destructive to the well-being of the Common-wealth; for righteous and just dealing exalteth a Nation, but fraud and deceit is a shame to any people; Our humble desire is that your Honours would take it into your serious considerations, and doe between us according to the rules of justice and righteousness, that we may speedily be discharged of our long and tedious attendance, our large and great expences, and may returne home to our families and callings, and continue to pray that God would prosper you in your great and laborious endeavours in perfecting the great worke of reformation in this Nation.

FINIS.

